

Remembering Thomas Fitzpatrick

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My initial meeting with Dr Thomas Fitzpatrick occurred when I was interviewing for a Residency position at Harvard Medical School Hospitals. When he saw on my CV that I graduated from Kalamazoo College and that I had been interested in both Chemistry and Biology, he asked about my organic chemistry synthesis projects. I thought this was rather odd until it turned out that my Chemistry Professor, Dr Kurt Kaufman, had challenged us to perform some chemical synthesis that generated various coumarin-derivatives that had been shipped to Boston as part of an ongoing collaboration between Drs Fitzpatrick and Kaufman. Little did I know that even in college I was involved in projects related to dermatological research!

The other initial impression that I can recall relates to Dr Fitzpatrick's office, in which there was not only a nice view overlooking the water, but also this enormous desk that Fitz sat behind. I am not sure how they ever got that desk into his office, or if they have ever figured out how to move it, but to this day I still think about that piece of furniture.

On a more serious note, I was fortunate to have completed my residency at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in the Department of Pathology, and I enjoyed the opportunity to take the trolley between the Brigham and MGH to regularly attend the clinical presentations, as well as the Dermatopathology consultation service of Dr Martin

Mihm. Those early days in Boston were extremely important in providing a solid foundation for the rest of my career, and I consider myself privileged to have had the opportunity to listen to and learn from one of the great masters in Dermatology – Dr Thomas Fitzpatrick. Fitz set a high standard of excellence, not only in patient care, but also in research, and in Boston I heard some of the most interesting, provocative, and even controversial lectures ever delivered by an academic dermatologist.

Many times when I would see patients with Dr Eugene Farber at Stanford, or engage with Dr Farber about a research question, I would be reminded that both men strived for excellence and demanded no less than the best from their residents and fellows. Having been born and raised in the Midwest, I quickly felt at ease with both of these amazing men, and I greatly admired their work ethic and their commitment to medical dermatology and their patients. I suspect we will have to wait quite a while to see the likes of Dr Fitzpatrick again as a leader in Dermatology, but his legacy is immense and I believe it is entirely appropriate at this time to dedicate an entire issue of the JID to his memory and accomplishments.

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